

A LICENSE TO CARE

By Pamela A. Grau & Sally Sumner

The changing healthcare environment brought about by managed care and administrative cost cutting has created an identity crisis for Licensed Nurses. UAP's (Unlicensed Assistive Personnel) now assimilate the duties, look and even wear the badges of their licensed counterparts. No longer recognized by patients, even licensed nurses have difficulty identifying their peers. For two Pennsylvania nurses, Sally Sumner and Pam Grau, this issue became a personal crusade and an entrepreneurial opportunity.

With over 22 years experience each, Pam and Sally experienced firsthand this paradigm shift in healthcare. Sally had been hearing from colleagues about personal experiences with "restructuring" and changes in job descriptions.

According to Sally, one such experience involved a large urban teaching hospital which eliminated the nursing title and created two new categories of workers, Patient Care Assistants and Patient Care Associates. "The Patient Care Assistants were UAP's and the Patient Care Associates were all licensed care givers including nurses, respiratory therapists, social workers, etc."

"The hospital counted on its patients to be easily duped! Expecting a Licensed Nurse to provide care when they entered the hospital, the administrators knew the public couldn't tell the difference between licensed nurses and UAP's. In fact, the hospital purposefully misrepresented that fact. Some nurses were even told **NOT TO TELL THEIR PATIENTS THEY WERE THE NURSE!**" said Sumner.

This really hit home for Pam when her father was hospitalized in a local area hospital. During the course of one of her visits she observed several different caregivers who came into the room and performed some type of care. These caregivers, as in most hospitals, wore a mixture of different color scrubs. Name badges were not present and these workers wore an employee badge, which was not easily visible and not easily readable.

After several workers provided care to her father, she asked him, "Which of those workers is the licensed nurse?". Her father had somewhat of a perplexed look on his face as he responded, "Why all of them!". As Pam reflected upon this she realized that their father had no way of knowing one way or the other who was or was not the licensed caregiver.

"I decided that as a experienced RN I should have been able to identify the Licensed Nurse by the job performed. But with

the shift in job descriptions and delegation of tasks to UAP's, I realized it was unsafe to assume that because a worker performed a particular task that they were in fact a licensed nurse," said Grau.

For many years the licensed nurse was distinguished to patients by their long sleeve white uniform, white shoes, and cap. As nursing has evolved so too has the uniform. Today's nurses wear uniforms that reflect current styles, practicality, and durability. A variety of colors are worn and rarely, if ever, will a consumer see a nurse wearing a traditional white uniform. Further complicating the issue, everyone in the healthcare setting from surgeons to housekeeping now wear the same or similar uniforms! As Pam and Sally discussed this incident and shared their personal experiences with each other, they asked themselves, "If we as critical care RN's of 22 years cannot distinguish the Licensed Nurses from other workers, how could a patient even begin to tell them apart?"

"We felt that it was imperative for licensed nurses to take responsibility and be proactive in identifying themselves to their patients and their families," said Grau. "This is something that every individual nurse owes to themselves and their profession.

"We also believe that identifying Licensed Nurses is the first step in educating the public about the changes in healthcare and the dangerous implications of fewer licensed nurse in healthcare facilities," said Sumner.

According to several recent studies filled out by healthcare professionals; 56% of the respondents had seen an increase in unexpected re-admission, and 52% had seen an increase in sickness and injury related complications. 32% indicated an increase in nosocomial/wound infections and 57% of all nurse say the quality in their facility didn't meet their professional standards! Even more frightening, almost 2 out of every 5 nurses say they wouldn't want a family member treated at their own facility!

"Many nursing leaders and administrators take the position that there are a 100 tasks that can be performed by minimally trained workers which would take the burden and stress off the Licensed Nurse without risk to the patient" said Sumner. "Perhaps those individuals need to revisit the story of 46 year old mother of two who entered a Cincinnati, Ohio hospital for a 'routine hysterectomy' and died from sepsis. Her family sued and won a large settlement because the UAP's caring for her lacked the expertise to interpret her complaints."

Recognizing the need in the nursing community to identify Licensed Nurses, Sally and Pam who both have an entrepreneurial spirit, set out to develop easily recognized logos utilizing the "RN" and "LPN" letters. The letters are set against a silhouette of the sun and moon which reflect the 24 hours in every day that licensed nurses are providing care. The colors are bold and the letter are large and easily readable. Even clients with poor vision can easily see and read the letters.

Together with a business and marketing expert, Bruce Billow, they created and developed a full line of products to assist Licensed Nurses in distinguishing and identifying themselves. The logo was first introduced during the first March on Washington in March of 1995 and it was well received by the participants. In April of 1995, Pam and Sally contacted the American Nurses Association (ANA) to request cooperation and assistance in promoting the product and "getting the word out" and also to exhibit at the next House of Delegates meeting. "The ANA refused our request for exhibitor status because our products, 'would conflict with ANA products'," Pam said, after a conversation with the Marketing Department at ANA. Sally added, "Despite the fact that at this time ANA had not developed their own RN insignia and the ANA goals include a commitment to 'support the economic and general welfare of nurses' ANA retains the right to refuse any exhibitor."

Since then, Pam and Sally have learned that ANA routinely refuses legitimate exhibitors due to what they describe as "conflicts". "This decision by ANA seems to be arbitrary", stated Sally, "for example, ANA is a publisher yet they invite other publishers to exhibit!" As if educated, professional women and men cannot decide which products serve them best! Pam said, "This is the most critical issues that nursing has even faced in the 20 plus years I have been a nurse and you would think that ANA would jump on the opportunity to support any nurse who is working 'for the cause!'".

Sally said, "This is just another example of the ANA working at cross purposes with it's membership." Both Pam and Sally feel "frustrated" with the ANA whenever nursing is dealing with current and emerging issues. Despite this difficulty the "License the Care"™ product line has been successfully intro-

duced and even expanded.

A full color, eight page brochure is available and all products feature the RN logo, with the insignia embroidered directly onto scrubs, lab coat, warm-up jackets and polo shirts. "This enables the licensed nurse to wear the "A License to Care"™ clothing line without concern over dress code policies that disallow the wearing of buttons and pins," said Sumner. "We also have a full selection of products that licensed nurses can use for work or home, including tote bag, travel mug, water bottle, key rings, pocket lights, pen-on-a-rope, buttons, and pins."

"Also, there is a full line of "fun wear" including sweatshirts, ball caps, fanny packs, tee shirts, and umbrellas. Many of the products display the, "A License to Care"™ slogan directly on the product," added Grau.

After developing the logo and the product line, distribution and fulfillment had to be addressed. These are areas where Sally and Pam had to learn a whole new industry.

"We didn't want to be concerned with inventorying all the merchandise, and the headaches that go along with it," said Grau. "So we formed a partnership with "The Creative Factor" who houses all the inventory, takes out orders, processes the payments and ships the order to nurses.

To assist in the promotion of the "A License to Care"™ concept and product line, Pam and Sally are enlisting the assistance of nurses across the country as Field Distributors.

"This program just started so we have lots of opportunities. We have distributors from Washington State to Puerto Rico, and we're still only reaching a tiny percentage of the 2.2 million active Licensed Nurses. The Field Distributors essentially promote the product line and share the message, Identify Yourself!

"Each field distributor is assigned their own ID number for catalog, phone and repeat orders. Every customer is asked for the ID number on a catalog and each transaction get logged into the computer. Once a month the distributor receives a percentage of the gross sales make to their ID," said Sumner.

According to partner Bruce Billow, "Sally and Pam have made the 'Identify Yourself' logo internationally recognized almost overnight." In addition to being written up in many national newspapers, and major nursing trade journals, the logo now appears on two of TV's hottest

shows. The actresses playing nurses on NBC's number one rated "ER" and CBS's "Chicago Hope" proudly wear the "A License to Care"™ logo.

In addition to TV and newspaper coverage the "A License to Care"™ product line has its own website at <<<http://www.nurseid.com>>> "We've tried to make the website as interactive and focused to the issues of downsizing and deskilling as possible," said Grau. "Online nurses can view the product line, place e-mail orders, look at a picture history of nursing uniforms, read about pending legislation, and chat with other nurses regarding the various changes and issues in our industry."

"When you read in the newspaper that the local hospital is recruiting workers whose requirements are reading and basic math skills, given a 34 day training course, slapped with the title of 'Multi-skilled tech', and released into the clinical area to take vital signs, draw blood, clean wounds and perform EKG's, every Licensed Nurse should be incensed and eager to promote themselves as professionals," said Grau. To order "A License to Care"™ merchandise or for a free catalog call 1-(800) NURSE ID. For more information about Criticare ID, Inc. and distributorship opportunities call (610)558-2298.

[PAMELA A. GRAU, R.N. has worked extensively in the critical care units of acute care hospitals in New Jersey, Connecticut and Pennsylvania. Grau has authored numerous articles published in a variety of nursing journals and publications such as the American Journal of Nursing.

SALLY M. SUMNER, R.N. has served as Supervisor of Critical Care in several Pennsylvania hospitals, and as a Clinical Editor for Nursing books. She is a mentor to nurse colleagues interested in becoming entrepreneurs. She is also an editorial consultant to Springhouse Corporation.

Both authors have been a nurse entrepreneur for 15 years. They provide temporary Registered Nurses to the specialty units of acute care hospitals through their company Critical Care Registered Nursing, Inc. A sister company, Chadds Ford AlternaCare provides professional and paraprofessional healthcare workers to a variety of elder care settings.]

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ART 1 TEXT

License To Care

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Synopsis - Hospital downsizing and its effect on nurse staffing motivated these nurses to start
“ A License to Care “ movement that clearly identifies professional nurses.